



“Close Encounters” provides insights into Aruban culture

“The weather is great and the food is excellent,” states Regge Life, one of the attendees of the four-day Cultural Conference being conducted by the Caribbean University of Aruba. These four days of “Close Encounters of a Differing Kind” began on Thursday, December 1, and are exposing an international group of delegates and even some native Arubians to island culture and history in depth, a diverse culture, rich in tradition and creativity.

The opening ceremonies on Thursday evening featured dance, music, and poetry by local artists and performers. The Dande group “The Failures” founded by Director Clyde Burke, the group demonstrated the art of making music using anything at hand, including empty bottles, a bucket, and foil paper.

The group Sodo y Cuero explained and performed typical Tambu music, and native poets Olaga Zaandam Buckley and Munye Oduber Winklaar recited some of their works for the gathering.

Friday saw a full day of activities from early morning until late at night.

The day began with a lecture by Ramon Todd Dandare, on “Papiamentu: a progressive Creole language in the Caribbean” and continued through the day with a tour of downtown Oranjestad and the Whilaminastraat by local guide “Ito” and an explanation of historical and native architecture. A number of classic “Cunucu houses” which are lovingly maintained by their proprietors awaited the “ohh’s and ahh’s” of Ito’s eager students. Several good examples of these charming structures can be seen, and make for interesting dining at restaurants such as “La Fondue” and “Cuba’s Cooking” both historic landmarks. Of course another classic example of the colonial times mansion is the “Stanhuis” which is now the Town Hall and the official office for marriages. It is no wonder that getting married in Aruba has become so popular, when it can take place in this beautifully restored historic building, and the students were appreciative of the detailing that demonstrated how the wealthy lived in the early days of Aruba.

The conference is not only about Aruban culture, and Friday evening’s activity at Access Art Gallery was a screening of the film “After America-After Japan” by documentary filmmaker Regge Life, followed by a cultural happy hour. Saturday’s program included a lecture by Keynote Speaker Chiara Bollentini titled “Native Culture and Literature in Guatemala” and the day ended with a “Close Encounter in San Nicholas.” Other activities are lectures about “Identity in the Diaspora: French Caribbean living in France” by Professor Dr. Annamaria Lammel and “Encounters between Latin American and U.S. Americans” by Dr. Rosita Albert. Despite the fact that activities outside the lectures are an in-depth exposure to Aruban culture, ecology and art, the conference touches on different groups, not only ones that are a part of the Caribbean Community. Conferences such as this help to promote better understanding of not only the differences in various cultures, but also the elements that make them unique and admirable. Countries should preserve and retain the cultures that make them unique and give them character, and it is through understanding and appreciation of these differences that we help to encourage world harmony instead of hate and prejudice.

The conference continues through Sunday with a final farewell at the Flor de Oriente, a popular local gathering place, which dates back to colonial times, and the site of the “The Blau Steg” a project by the Caribbean University of Aruba. The restoration of this neighborhood will provide a home for the University and a cultural center for the presentation of all the arts.